

invention as defined in the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for labeling and stacking a plurality of flower pot covers, each of the flower pot covers having an outer surface, an open upper end and a retaining space openly communicating with the open upper end, the method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a first conveyor having a plurality of spatially disposed support assemblies connected thereto, each of the support assemblies selectively movable between a retracted position and an extended position, a portion of each of the support assemblies configured to substantially correspond to the configuration of the retaining space of the flower pot cover;
- (b) positioning flower pot covers on respective support assemblies whereby the flower pot covers are moved through a first travel path;
- (c) automatically applying a label to each flower pot cover; and
- (d) automatically stacking the labeled flower pot covers.

2. The method for labeling and stacking a plurality of flower pot covers of claim 1 wherein step (d) is further defined as automatically stacking the labeled flower pot covers into an object receiving space defined by a chute to form a nested stack of

flower pot covers.

3. The method for labeling and stacking a plurality of flower pot covers of claim 2, further including the step of:

(e) removing the nested stack of flower pot covers from the object receiving space of the chute.

4. The method for labeling and stacking a plurality of flower pot covers of claim 1 wherein in step d, the support assemblies are moved between a retracted position and an extended position to position the flower pot covers supported by the respective support assemblies into the stack of flower pot covers.

5. An apparatus for labeling and stacking flower pot covers, each of the flower pot covers having an outer surface, an open upper end and a retaining space, the apparatus comprising:

a first conveyor;

a plurality of spatially disposed support assemblies connected to the first conveyor, each of the support assemblies selectively movable between a retracted position and an extended position, a portion of each of the

support assemblies disposable within the retaining space of a flower pot cover when the flower pot cover is in an inverted position;

a second conveyor supported by the frame such that a portion of the second conveyor overlaps a portion of the first conveyor;

a plurality of chutes connected to the second conveyor, each of the chutes having an open end and an object receiving space, each of the plurality of chutes alignable with one of the support assemblies upon movement of the first and second conveyors along their respective travel paths;

motor means operably connected to the first and second conveyors for providing synchronized movement of the first and second conveyors;

a labeler assembly disposed near the first conveyor upstream of the position where the second conveyor overlaps a portion of the first conveyor;

sensor means for detecting the presence of a flower pot cover on the support assembly approaching the labeler assembly, and upon detecting the presence of the flower pot cover, for activating the labeler assembly such that a label is automatically applied to the outer surface of the flower pot cover; and

means for selectively moving each of the support assemblies to the extended position when one of the chutes on the second conveyor is aligned with

the open lower end of the chute whereby the support assembly moves the flower pot cover through the open lower end of the chute and into the object receiving space of the chute such that upon movement of the support assembly from the extended position to the retracted position the flower pot cover remains in the object receiving space of the chute.

6. The apparatus of claim 4 further comprising:
a plurality of gripping members disposed within the object receiving space of each of the chutes for retaining flower pot covers therein.
7. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the gripping members are elongated brushes having a plurality of bristles, and wherein the brushes are adjustably connected to the chute so that the size of the object receiving space can be varied to accommodate different sizes of flower pot covers.
8. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the sensor means comprises:
an object sensor for detecting the presence of the flower pot cover on the support assembly; and
an object support sensor for detecting the approach of a support assembly, the

object sensor, the object support sensor and the labeler assembly being operably connected whereby upon the object sensor detecting the presence of the flower pot cover on the support assembly, the object sensor enables the object support sensor which provides a signal to the labeler assembly to activate the labeler assembly when the enabled object support sensor detects the approaching support assembly having the flower pot cover thereon.

9. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the object sensor and the object support sensor are electric eyes.

10. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein each of the plurality of support assemblies comprises:

a cam follower assembly comprising:

a support block connected to the first conveyor;

a mandril slidably connected to the support block so as to provide upward and downward motion to the mandril; and

a cam follower connected to the mandril for imparting upward and downward motion to the mandril.